

REQUEST FOR BRIEF PROPOSALS

2015 Healthy Food Behavior Research Grants

Funding for the Period from January 1, 2016 to June 30, 2017

Deadline for brief proposal receipt: June 5, 2015 by 5:00 pm EST

Purpose

The BECR Center seeks brief proposals for Healthy Food Behavior Research Grants that draw on behavioral economics theory to develop and test strategies for improving food choice behavior using field experiments. Analyses using secondary data that demonstrate behavioral patterns that can be used to develop effective food choice improvement strategies are also encouraged. In particular, policy relevant research projects related to SNAP and WIC participants that employ behavioral economic strategies in the food retail environment, including farmers markets and institutional settings, are encouraged. Following the initial application process, selected applicants will be requested to submit a full proposal including a detailed project narrative.

The Duke-UNC USDA Center for Behavioral Economics and Healthy Food Choice Research (BECR Center)

The newly funded USDA Center for Behavioral Economics and Healthy Food Choice Research (BECR) at Duke University and the University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill (PI: Matthew Harding, Duke University) strives to apply behavioral economics theories and concepts to uncover potential interventions to improve food choice behaviors contributing to improved nutrition, food security, and the health of American consumers, and to increase the effectiveness of policies and programs designed to improve diets, especially for low-income households. The team will build the field of behavioral economics around food consumption choices with a particular focus on identifying the most successful levers required to motivate healthy food choices and quantifying their effectiveness with regard to the individual consumer, food retailers, and the food industry. The Center has three areas of focus-- the Special Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) clients, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) clients, and the general population. With this Request for Proposals, we are seeking external investigators to propose projects designed to include focused field experiments or evaluate major policy changes using secondary data that employ behavioral economic strategies in the food retail environment, including farmers markets and institutional settings.

Background on Behavioral Economics and Healthy Food Behavior Research

Though research on food choice behavior has been conducted by a number of researchers targeting both the individual consumer level and the policy level, our Center focuses on utilizing behavioral economics techniques in real world settings

PHONE

WEB

coupled with big data analysis to develop low cost nudges that can be utilized to influence healthy eating, particularly in the SNAP and WIC populations. We believe that an important component of changing food choice behavior involves the economically viable transformation of the environment in which the choice is being made. To this effect, we have secured relevant collaborators from industry and retail. Additionally, we have worked with state and national level colleagues in the WIC/SNAP/SNAP-Ed programs to explore the unique effects of food insecurity on food purchasing behavior.

Traditional economic theory assumes that humans are rational and self-centered, driven to maximize their personal utility. Economists believe that the invisible hand guides markets to efficiency and assume that people make reasoned, well-informed choices in their best interests - so long as they have all the necessary information.

By contrast, behavioral economics recognizes that people and organizations do not always make rational decisions and thus aims to explain how and why people make the (rational and irrational) decisions they do. The field of behavioral economics emerged in response to well-documented behavioral anomalies and marked deviations from the standard economic models. For example, behavioral economics research has shown that individuals are more sensitive to the possibility of a loss than they are to the possibility of an equivalent gain thereby explaining two well-documented phenomena in consumer behavior: the endowment effect (i.e. the tendency to overvalue owned goods) and the status quo bias (i.e. the tendency not to deviate from the current option). Similarly, behavioral economists have shown that individuals mentally segregate assets into non-fungible accounts (e.g. clothing, food) significantly impacting the utility that they assign to each asset.

Behavioral economics utilizes a wide range of theoretical tools from the behavioral sciences, from economics to psychology and marketing.¹⁻⁵ These include non-standard preferences (risk preferences, time preferences, social preferences), non-standard beliefs (overconfidence, over-projection of current tastes), and non-standard decision-making (framing, inattentiveness, responsiveness to social pressure and persuasion, emotiveness). By examining cognitive, emotional, and social aspects of the decision-making process, behavioral economics aims to predict actual behavior and design strategies that help people make decisions that are truly in their best interest. Behavioral economists have shown that small changes in the environment, such as changes in the default setting, or in the context of a decision (e.g., priming) can strongly affect the outcome of that decision.¹⁻⁵ These small changes have resulted in increased participation in savings programs and organ donation programs, and many other benefits to society.

By utilizing behavioral economics techniques, individuals can develop a large-scale experimental approach to uncover the behavioral levers required to motivate healthy food choices. Using these techniques, we aim to identify the most successful behavioral levers and to quantify their effectiveness, when applied at the individual consumer or program levels, as well as “upstream” via the food industry and food retailers.

Healthy Food Behavior Focusing on Behavioral Economics Approaches Grant Request

BECR will award up to 5 grants (of up to \$50,000) to teams of researchers to develop and implement focused field experiments or use secondary data using behavioral economics theory and strategies to improve food choice. Funding will span an 18-month period. In particular, policy relevant research projects related to SNAP and WIC participants are encouraged, guided by input from the Advisory Board and USDA colleagues. Projects that utilize behavioral economics and are feasible in the current policy environment are of particular interest.

We are expecting that the brief proposals will include clearly presented ideas for innovative interventions, based on behavioral economics theory, that are feasible within the current food environment.

Areas of Research

1. Focused Field Experiments Using Behavioral Economics Methods
 - a. Focused field experiments should explore novel behavioral interventions related to healthy food choices. The focus should be on identifying behavioral interventions that utilize behavioral economics methods and have potential to be policy-relevant, scalable in a cost-efficient manner, and persist over time.
2. Secondary Data (Big Data) Analysis Approach Using Behavioral Economics Methods
 - a. Big data approaches may use quasi-experimental approaches, such as natural experiments, to evaluate important behavioral patterns impacting dietary quality.
 - b. Secondary data analysis may also aim to inform future field experiments by uncovering behavioral anomalies and quantifying supply side responses to policy changes.
 - c. There is potential to utilize data available through the BECR Center, including transaction data from IRI. If you would like to utilize these data, you must contact Terry Hartman at 919-613-5907 or terry.hartman@duke.edu for approval prior to submitting your brief proposal. Please note that funding for projects utilizing BECR data will be conditional on the agreement and acceptance of third party agreements for data usage.
3. Mixed Methods Approach Using Behavioral Economics Methods
 - a. A mixed method approach will utilize a focused field experiment coupled with secondary data analysis.

Total Awards

Up to *five* (5) grants will be awarded. Grants will be for up to \$50,000 total award (inclusive of direct + indirect costs) for the 18-month funding period (January 1, 2016 to June 30, 2017). Please note that the funds are federal dollars and indirect rates are capped at 25%, but lower indirect rates are encouraged.

Eligibility Criteria

- Applicants can be researchers at institutions of higher learning, private research enterprises, state or local public health practitioners, and programmatic staff. Funds will be granted as subawards to the applicant's institution.
- Applicants are encouraged from a broad range of disciplines including, but not limited to, economics, public health, nutrition, marketing, business, psychology, or a related field.
- The BECR Center is dedicated to supporting emerging researchers. Thus, some preference will be given to emerging researchers in the behavioral economics and food choice fields, defined as individuals who received a doctoral degree within the last ten years prior to the date of the award or those new to the field of behavioral economics or the application of behavioral economic techniques to healthy food choices. The BECR Center embraces diversity and inclusion across multiple dimensions, such as race, ethnicity, gender, disability, age, sexual orientation and identity, and socioeconomic status.
- Applicants must be based in the United States or its territories.

- Applicants should demonstrate an understanding of behavioral economics and its application to healthy food behavior.

Application Instructions

We are using a 2-part application process:

- 1) Applicants will submit brief proposals with project narratives, and
- 2) Applicants who are selected for the next round will be requested to submit full proposals including detailed project narratives.

The Part 1 brief proposals are due by **Friday, June 5, 2015 by 5:00 pm EST**. Proposals should include the following.

Section	Length	Format
1. Application Information		See brief proposal form for required information
2. Project Narrative (rationale, purpose and aims, research design and methods)	3 page limit	1.5 spaced with 1-inch margins and 12-point font.
3. Scope of Work (include research team summary with project roles and timeline)	2 page limit	1.5 spaced with 1-inch margins and 12-point font.
4. Key Personnel Biosketches	4-page limit per key individual	Please use new NIH biosketch format
5. Brief Budget Overview		See budget template for required information

Complete brief proposals should be converted to PDF in order and submitted via email, all as one document (Application information, project narrative, references, appendices, scope of work, key personnel biosketches, and budget and narrative). Please submit your completed application to the BECR Center at becr@duke.edu.

For questions related to this RFP please contact Terry Hartman, MPH, MS at (919) 613-5907 or terry.hartman@duke.edu.

Selection Criteria

1. Demonstration of an understanding of behavioral economics and low cost nudges to influence food behavior or the utilization of secondary data to answer research questions.
2. A clear explanation and application to behavioral economics.
3. We have a particular interest in policy relevant research projects related to SNAP and WIC participants.
4. A clear proposal for innovations to be tested in the food retail environment that are feasible in the current policy environment without requiring major policy changes.
5. The qualifications and experience of personnel, including an understanding of behavioral economics.

Invitations to submit full proposals will be made and notifications sent by *July 3, 2015*.

Reporting Requirements

Recipients of the grants will be required to provide twice yearly progress reports to the Center, as well as a final activity and financial report. Researchers will be encouraged to present both preliminary and final results during the annual meetings and provided technical assistance to disseminate research findings to a diverse audience of stakeholders. In addition to the usual academic papers resulting from the research effort, recipients will be required to present their findings in a webinar for the appropriate audience, which will be identified with support from the Center. Recipients of the grants will also be required to provide non-technical Research Reviews and Issue Briefs which the Center will distribute to appropriate stake holders.

Brief Proposal Follow Up

The selection process and follow up on brief proposals will be made by the BECR Center Director, Matthew Harding, Ph.D., assisted by the Center's assistant director and faculty collaborators. Applicants will be notified via email June 29, 2015 if a full proposal is requested. Further instructions related to the full proposal will be included with the invitation for application. The full proposal will include further elaboration on the proposed project.

IMPORTANT DATES

- Applications due: *June 5, 2015 by 5:00 pm EST*
- Notification to all applicants: *July 3, 2015*
- Full proposals are due: *August 7, 2015 by 5:00 pm EST*
- Notification of Awards: *September 11, 2015*
- Start Date of Funded Projects: *January 1, 2016*
- End Date of funded projects: *June 30, 2017*

References

1. Johnson EJ, Shu SB, Dellaert BG, Fox C, Goldstein DG, Häubl G, Larrick RP, Payne JW, Peters E, Schkade D, Wansink B, Weber EU. 2012. Beyond nudges: Tools of a choice architecture. *Marketing Letters*, 23(2), 487-504.
2. DellaVigna S. 2009. Psychology and Economics: Evidence from the Field. *Journal of Economic Literature* 47: 315-72.
3. Kahneman D, Knetsch J, Thaler R. 1991. The endowment effect, loss aversion, and the status quo bias. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 5:193-206.
4. Thaler R. 1980. Toward a positive theory of consumer choice. *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization*, 1:39-60.
5. Thaler R, Sunstein, CR. 2008. *Nudge: improving decisions about health, wealth, and happiness*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

1. Application Information

Organization Information	
Organization Tax Identification Number	
Address	
Website	
Principal Investigator (name and degrees)	
Phone	
Email	
Contact for questions regarding application (if different than the PI)	
Phone	
E-mail	

2. Project Narrative

In this section, be sure to include the following information:

- 1) Your proposed hypothesis/question(s), how it relates to the RFP, and how the findings align with the interests of the BECR Center.
- 2) Supportive data/studies
- 3) Data sources and quantitative or qualitative methods you propose to use to test the hypothesis/question
- 4) Anticipated opportunities and challenges that are likely to affect the research project, including a plan for how challenges will be addressed

This section of the proposal should not exceed 3 pages.

4. Scope of Work

Include roles of research personnel with FTEs.

This section of the proposal should not exceed 2 pages.

3. Key Personnel Biosketches

Please include biosketch in the new NIH format for all relevant key personnel (4 page limit on individual biosketches).

5. Budget Overview

Provide general estimated total costs for each category for the funding period. A more detailed budget and narrative will be required for invited proposals. The selected applicants should demonstrate the manner in which funds will be allocated to best serve the BECR's goals to provide financial support for research, including, but not necessarily limited to, the level of indirect costs (1) charged by the applicant and (2) allowed to the institutions of researchers receiving subawards.

Personnel (Salary and Fringe)	
Supplies	
Travel	
Consultants	
Other Direct Costs	
Indirect (<i>may not exceed 25% of above costs</i>)	
TOTAL	